

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR JOHN TURNER

Professor John Turner, OBE (1974), MA, PhD, (Cantab.), LLD (Melb. Hon.), FAA was Professor of Botany at Melbourne University from 1938 to 1973. During that period he was a member and later a councillor of the Royal Society of Victoria. He was president from 1951 to 1952.

Professor Turner was born in Yorkshire in 1908, son of T. S. Turner, and was educated at Sheffield Central School and at Cambridge University. He came to Melbourne in 1938 as a young man from Cambridge where he was Senior Demonstrator and where he had made a significant contribution to research on the physiology of tissue respiration, pioneering the use of the Warburg manometer. He arrived in a drought year and experienced the dreadful bush fires that swept through Victoria in January 1939. During the Second World War Professors Turner and Hartung established an optical laboratory in the Botany School where optical instruments intended for the tropics were proofed with fungicide to prevent mould.

Throughout his 35 years as head of the department, Professor Turner taught students from first year biology to final year. He led a group of research students in plant physiology. In 1952 he was elected as a corresponding member of the American Society of Plant Physiologists, and in 1956 he was made a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science in recognition of his research in plant physiology. He served on the Council of the Academy from 1967 to 1970.

Recognising the need for a modern ecological approach to land management, Professor Turner organised the Academy's ecological research in the Kosciuszko National Park. He also headed a team of ecologists in research on the flora of the Victorian High Plains. The whole department was involved in this ecological venture, and we all owe much to his inspired leadership and stimulating company. One of his major achievements was to establish the field laboratory and bunkhouse at Wilsons Promontory as a centre for student excursions and research projects. His love of field work emanated from student days on the Yorkshire and Derbyshire moors.

During the last 50 years Professor Turner made a lasting contribution to the conservation

of the Australian landscape and flora. He had both national and international standing and was author of definitive reports based on scientific evidence for areas such as Norfolk Island (for the Australian Conservation Foundation). His work with the "Save the Dandenongs League" prevented over-commercialisation of the Dandenong Ranges and resulted in a scenic bush park with superb views of mountain, forest and water. He worked to save roadside trees in the Dandenongs, in Hawthorn and on St Kilda Road.

Professor Turner was a foundation member of the National Trust, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Victorian National Parks Association (president 1969–1973), and the Land Conservation Council (member 1970–1979). His positive clear thinking underlies the principles which form the bases of these organisations. He was chairman of the Maud Gibson Trust which funded the preparation and publication of *The Handbook to Plants in Victoria* by James Willis, and the formation of the Royal Botanic Gardens Annexe at Cranbourne, 330 ha for the growing of Australian native species. While councillor and president of the Victorian National Parks Association, Professor Turner supervised and edited their first major publication, *Nature Conservation in Victoria* by Judith Frankenberg.

As an educationalist Professor Turner had a major impact on school General Science, ensuring that students in years 9 and 10 received a broad science basis instead of selecting from four individual science subjects. He was co-author of a general science text in 1943. Subsequently he revolutionised biology teaching for years 11 and 12 by co-operating with David Morgan to produce *The Web of Life*. He was chairman of the Board of Forestry Education for nearly 20 years, and helped to achieve integration of Forestry at Creswick and at the University of Melbourne. Professor Turner was Dean of Science in 1968 and served on the University Council for many years.

Professor Turner appreciated landscapes both as an ecologist and as an artist, in drawings, watercolours, linocuts, scrapeboard and later in lithographs. He was President of the National Gallery Society of Victoria.

As a person Professor Turner mastered the art of conversation. Humour, wit and a fund of good yarns made him the very antithesis of the monocultural stereotype immortalised by C. P. Snow. Many an evening has been brightened by his light-hearted verse. His love of plants, of gardens and of the bush, shows through all his interests. He retired to Castlemaine where he died on

5 May 1991. He is survived by his wife, Kaye, his children, Susan and Peter, and four grandsons.

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